

A Short History of Santa Clara

The area now designated as Santa Clara was a part of a larger area known as Pleasant Grove, which included six districts in addition to Santa Clara. This was one of the first voting precincts in Lane County. It extended east to the Willamette River, north to the John Brown donation land claim; then west by the Spencer, Meek and Awbrey places to a point west of Irving; then south to the Bethel and River Road districts; and east to the River. The name was changed to Santa Clara in 1890 when Col. A. J. Straight came in and bought the farms of the Potters and Grays, which were subdivided for the purpose of selling in smaller tracts. The school was moved from its first site, on the Irving Road a half mile west of the present site. It was called Santa Clara because the new subdivisions were advertised under that name, given them by Col. Straight who came from Santa Clara, California.

Actual settlement began in the lower Willamette Valley in 1829, when the first soil was turned. However, it was not until 1846 that a pioneer home was built in Lane County. In that year Elijah Bristow was granted a claim at Pleasant Hill and shortly after, Eugene Skinner was granted a claim where Eugene now stands. "Realizing this was the best location along the Willamette River, he so planned his claim that he was able to control both sides of the stream, thus having a monopoly on the most available ferry sites in this immediate vicinity." (1)

The provisional government was organized in 1843, consisting of an executive committee of three and nine legislators. At this time the territory was divided into four districts, Twality and Yamhill, lying west of the Willamette; and Clackamas, and Champoeg lying east of the Willamette River. Pleasant Grove was in the Yamhill district. As population increased, these areas were subdivided and the new areas were called counties. Lane County was created in 1851, though it had been a part of Linn County from 1847 to 1851. Two years previously the territorial government was created by an act of Congress, and the provisional government was abolished, so that Lane County became a county under an act of the territorial government.

Pleasant Grove was not settled as early as the higher land in the vicinity. Much of the land in the eastern part of the district was swampy and covered with a heavy growth of maple and fir trees and thick matted underbrush. Vine maple covered the whole of the eastern portion along the river. As late

as the school days of “Aunt Het” Robinson the boys would swing nearly all the way from the school to their homes along the river valley. Furthermore, the settlers had been told that the land was subject to overflow and took the higher land in the beginning. The soil was very black and rich and there was scarcely any gravel. There was one strip, known as the “gravel rim” which extended from the present schoolhouse north to Spring Creek Drive.

Paths were cut through the woods to the pioneers’ homes. Finally these wove themselves into some sort of system of roads as they were traveled more and more by newcomers. When one passes through beautiful Santa Clara in 1931 and sees the orchards in bloom or bearing their fruits, the neat modern homes with beautiful well planned and ornamented lawns, and the successful dairy farms and other types of farming which suggest comfort, satisfaction, and a reasonable economic return, it is hard to believe that the persons who made all this possible by clearing the land, erecting a tiny log cabin, and working with the crudest of implements, reaped only a slim existence for their efforts. When they were finally able to produce a crop they could get no return for it. Butter was used for axle grease; eggs were high at ten cents a dozen; and labor was plentiful at thirty cents a day.

Transportation and communication were the major problems of the early settlers. Pioneers mailed their letters at the nearest post office at Weston, Missouri, two thousand miles away, until 1850. The mail was carried by travelers who could not be held responsible for delivery of mail. Some mail was sent around the Horn after 1851. In this same year the U.S. government issued a three-cent stamp for letters. However, the Oregon provisional government created post offices of its own in 1846 in Astoria, Portland, Oregon City and Corvallis. In 1850 the U.S. government established six mail routes in the Willamette Valley. The first one was from Astoria to Eugene and Pleasant Hill.

In 1856 steamboat transportation was extended to Eugene from Corvallis. “The ‘James Clinton’ then ran through and saved a long haul by ox team over rough roads.” (2)

The first scheduled stage coach route established out of Eugene was in 1860, when the Oregon Stage Company and the California Stage Company connected, forming stage transportation from Sacramento, California to Portland, Oregon. Here connection was made with the Overland Route to St. Joseph, Missouri. The stage route did not pass through Santa Clara but

was on the "Prairie Road" which runs west of the present community center. This road connected with the coast highway at Franklin.

About 1870 Pleasant Grove decided to have some real roads. They established a principal road forty feet wide. It had been the custom to work off the poll tax on the road at the rate of a dollar a day by filling up the mud holes along the road. There was some gravel on the gravel rim, which was carried and put in the mud holes, or more dirt was put on and an attempt was made to drain the mud holes. Most of us can remember when Oregon had only dirt roads. It was not until some time after the beginning of the twentieth century that any attempt was made to make a hard surfaced roadway. Many remember then the lumber was hauled for the Christian church. The men went to Elmira after the lumber for the church building. The roads were so muddy that George Robinson's wagon mired and he had to unload the lumber before he could pull his wagon out of the mud hole. This was as late as 1905.

Now Santa Clara is fortunate in having the U.S. Highway 99 running the full length of the community, and the principal side roads are all graveled. Santa Clara is no longer in the mud.

The first railroad through Eugene was built by the Oregon and California Railroad Company in 1868-70. This road extended from Portland to Roseburg. The first train to run on this new track came in on October 8, 1870, and Rufus Robertson, now of Springfield, but a former resident of Pleasant Grove, was on it. The nearest station on the north side of Pleasant Grove when the road was first built was Luper. The only building there was a warehouse, which burned a few years later. Later Wallet built a warehouse along the railroad a little farther south from Luper and it was called Irving. In the early days the place was called "Yellow Dog", named for the salamanders which were so plentiful in the slew by the railway track.

The first engines on this railroad were equipped with wood burners. There were great piles of wood placed along the tracks and the train would stop to refuel many times between Portland and Roseburg. One of these refueling places was on the old Maxwell place. Hoboes would also gather at these spots and were a great terror to the children of the neighborhood.

The Pleasant Grove District was divided after the railroad went through. The people in the lower valley voted at Irving after 1872. In 1880 the voting

precinct was made smaller and Pleasant Grove voted at its schoolhouse. By 1890 Pleasant Grove District was again divided so that the north end was made the Lone Pine District, the south end was made into Bethel and River Road Districts, and the west side was made into Clear Lake and Irving Districts.

Today Santa Clara has the facilities of the most modern form of transportation within a few minutes distance from every home. Highways are paved. Motor bus service is regular and runs the full length of the community. The airplane field is only five miles away, where one can get Pacific Coast or eastern transportation planes. And the Southern Pacific has made successful railroads out of the many failures of the past.

The climate in the Willamette is about the only condition that has not changed since 1850. Floods and freezes are still occurring occasionally. Some might remember the first time the early pioneers experienced the Willamette River freezing in the winter of 1887. It was not expected, since it had never happened before in their memory. However, there have been similar experiences since that time and Oregonians know that one can expect zero weather occasionally.

The most severe floods in the Santa Clara Community were in 1861 and 1881. In 1881 "Uncle Dick" Robinson lost six hundred head of sheep, Sam Meek lost seventy-five hogs, and Dr. A.W. Patterson, Sam Howard, Thomas Gray and Jerry Luckey all lost livestock as well as grain. During this same flood Jean Luckey and Ed McClanahan went from Eugene to Junction City by boat. They rescued the Emerson family, living in the eastern part of Santa Clara, who were marooned on their house. Following the flood of 1861 the farmers along the river built a levee from Shelton Hill, where the Rossman home is at present, to the John Brown home, which is now the George Robinson home.

Perhaps the greatest change that has taken place in Santa Clara since 1850 has been in the agricultural practices and the size of farms. The provisional government permitted a man to settle 640 acres of land. The U.S. government, previous to 1850, required \$1.25 an acre for any land settled, and the amount was not limited. Since the U.S. government did not have jurisdiction over the Oregon country until after the provisional government was set up, the land was held according to the local law. In 1850 the U.S. government passed the Donation Land Claim. "This law granted to every

white settler and American half-breed Indian, above the age of eighteen years, a citizen of the United States, or who had declared his intention to become a citizen before December 1, 1851, and a resident of the territory before December 1, 1850, one half-section of land, if a single man; or one section of land if married before December 1, 1851. In the latter case one-half acre of the claim was granted to the husband and the other half to his wife, 'to be held by her in her own right; and the surveyor usually shall designate the part inuring to the husband, and that to the wife, and enter the same on the records of his office'.(3) Immigrants arriving in Oregon after December, 1850, and before December, 1855, were granted (by Act of Congress) just half this amount, but substantially the same conditions, except age, was raised to twenty-one. Oregon was one of the first states to recognize the right of women to hold real property in their own names, separate from their husbands.

The records show the following donation land claims for Pleasant Grove: Potter, Gray and Davis.

Pleasant Grove pioneers were fairly representative of the many types of men and women who had crossed the plains in the wagon trains. Here, as elsewhere, the plantation owner, mid-western farmer, mountaineer, the gold seeker, the adventurer, the trapper, and the Yankee farmer from down east all settled together in a new country. There was free land and equal opportunity for all.

First, the land must be cleared and the sod had to be turned for grain. There were oxen to do the work, and some horses. There were some hogs, some cattle, and some sheep in the Willamette Valley, and soon in Pleasant Grove. The first few years the principal food was potatoes and wheat, with pork for meat and a plenty of wild game. And there were hard times then as now. "Aunt Het" tells of her childhood when some of the children came to school and would play on the school grounds while eating a potato dumpling. This delicacy was made by grating the raw potato and then pouring boiling water over the grated potato, stirring the mixture until it became clear. This sticky, clear, gluey mass was dried and used as a food. It was as hard as stone. It is said that some winters many people had little else to live on but potatoes and such delicacies as the potato dumpling.

The first thirty-five years of life in Pleasant Grove was devoted to clearing and settling the land in fairly large tracts. However, after 1885 many

farmers had begun to exchange their land. Farms were being divided. Agriculture had become diversified. By this time the principal crops of the community were wheat, yielding forty bushels to the acre; oats; rye; barley; hops—one of the most important crops, and sold from fifteen to twenty cents a pound with an acre yield of “fifteen hundred to three thousand pounds”.(4) All sorts of fruits and vegetables could be grown and there was interest in starting the prune industry. Humphreys and Grays were the first families in the community to set out extensive prune orchards. This was in the fall of 1890.

By 1890 more farms were being divided and sold. Oregon was still a very new country with the most delightful climate in America, and newcomers were wanting land. Many of the large farms, such as the Grays, Potters and Humphreys, were subdivided and many farms were as small as twenty-five acres. Land was selling for approximately \$25 per acre. It was about this time that the type of farming changed the most, with the reduction in the size of the farms. The principal crops at this time were prunes, sheep, hogs, and some truck gardening.

By 1910 farms in Lane County had decreased to half the size they were in 1870.(5) There was a steady decrease in the number of farms with a hundred acres or more, and a steady increase in the number of farms of less than a hundred acres to ten acre tracts. The predominating size of farms in Santa Clara today is approximately five to ten acres. There are a few large farms, but most of the land has proven too valuable for general farming purposes. Fruit, nuts, nursery culture, truck gardening, fox farming, and other intensive agriculture pursuits have taken the place of the older industries such as hop growing and wheat. Also, there are some very fine dairies in Santa Clara.

With the change in the type of farming there has also developed a denser population per acre. Previous to 1890 there were approximately fifty families in the same area, known as Santa Clara, in which there is today approximately a hundred and twenty-five families. And with the increase in the population has come a change in the school and churches. Many can remember the old schoolhouse of 1890. Few can remember the original schoolhouse built in 1851 or '52. It was made of logs, and was located about a half mile west of the present school. This house was burned and was replaced with a box-type building approximately twenty by sixteen feet. The benches were made of puncheon boards. This building was erected in

1875. Some of the pupils, now living, who attended the first school here are Clarence Luckey, Hattie Spencer Luckey, the Grays, Judge E.O. and L.H. Potter, Mary Potter, Addie Zumwalt, Jennings, Mattie Zumwalt Bond, Mary Montgomery Bowers, Laura Montgomery Martam, Ella Montgomery Harrington, Emmett and Dee Howard, Bell Bushnell Bond, Myrod Judkins, Jennie Spencer Luckey, Eliza Spencer Barbree, and Richard T. Robinson.

Here was the center of the social life of Pleasant Grove. The church services and Sunday school services were held here. The Methodist minister from Eugene came out occasionally to preach at the meetings. The men sat on one side of the room and the women on the other.

About 1890 the young men in the community organized a band, probably one of the first organizations of Pleasant Grove, which changed its name to Santa Clara about that time. Here in the schoolhouse sixteen young men of the community met regularly for "band practice". There was no outside leader to "get them started". John Christian was their leader and gave them their instructions.

At the time the community changed its name to Santa Clara the school was moved to its present site. In 1904 this was made into a two-room school building. In 1913 this was raised and remodeled into a two-story, four-room school building, and a high school was started. This required more room so in 1915 they built a one-room building in the corner of the grounds for the first three grades. For the last four years the school was so inadequate that the school used the kitchen of the community hall for a classroom. But by January, 1931, Santa Clara had erected a six-room modern schoolhouse and now has a standard public school of eight grades and a high school.

The northern part of the district has a school which was built to accommodate those in that part of the district when the smaller school became so crowded. But this school will be closed in 1931 and all children of the district will attend the new school.

The Parent-Teachers Association, which was organized in 1923, with Mrs. Arndt as its first president, has contributed a great deal toward creating a greater interest in the problems of the school and the solving of those problems. The organization had one hundred and eight members. Mrs. H.P. Emerson is president this year.

The first Sunday school in Santa Clara was held in the schoolhouse as far back as the oldest residents can remember. Several remember attending Sunday school as long ago as 1875. Church services were held occasionally in the schoolhouse. But in 1905 Santa Clara Christian church was erected. Members of the church donated their time and labor in its construction. It was dedicated March 4, 1906, by E.C. Sanderson, who was Dean of the Bible College. The charter membership was thirty-eight.

The first minister was Henry Champee, who came on June 26, 1906, and received a salary of "\$4.00 for the morning service, and the evening service was paid for in vegetables". Since that time Santa Clara church has had eight ministers and has grown in membership to one hundred and fifty-one and a Sunday school enrollment of one hundred and sixty-nine.

The Ladies Aid society was organized by Mrs. E.L. Gum at her home in March, 1905. After the church was erected the Ladies Aid Society became a branch of the church organization. Now there are 174 members.

The missionary Society was organized in 1924 with twenty members. Mrs. Esther Strome was instrumental in taking up missionary work as part of the church program. The first president of the Missionary Society was Mrs. J.W. Hockaday. Today Mrs. H.R. Emerson is president, and there are eleven members.

The Santa Clara Women's club is a social and educational organization of the community which was organized in 1921 as the "Needle Club" with a membership of ten women. In 1927 the club affiliated with the State Federation of Women's Clubs and was "renamed the 'Faire La Noce Club', which means a pleasant gathering". At the present time there are twenty-five members. Mrs. Edward Hart, who was the organizer of the Needle Club, is president for 1931-32.

The Santa Clara Grange was organized in 1916. The first master was J.J. Nicholle. There was no satisfactory meeting place for the large membership so they decided to build a hall which was completed by 1918. In 1920 the Grange was formally disbanded and the following year a Community Club was organized. The Grange hall was deeded to the school district. The Community Club was very active for eight years. Many persons joined the Community Club who did not belong to the Grange. It was decided to change to a Grange again, so in 1929 the Grange was reorganized and the

Community Club was disbanded. Some of the persons who belonged to the Community Club joined the Grange, though not all of them.

In 1925 Santa Clara organized a 4-H Club under the direction of Miss Flora Rader. Formerly the group of girls was Camp Fire Girls who had organized in 1915, under the leadership of Miss Josephine Hard and Mrs. Ed Goumph. Since 1925 there has been an active 4-H Club program in the community.

Santa Clara has only one Spanish-American War Veteran, who is T.B. Harris, brother of Mrs. H.R. Emerson. However, fifteen men and one woman gave their services during the World War. These are Ray Fellows, Fred Hurd, John Hurd, Glen Robertson, Neal Robertson, Robert Robertson, John A. Hart, Donald Schaffner, Ralph Hicks, James B. Chapman, George P. Chapman, Avon D. Babb, Glen Strome, Earl Baker, and Elizabeth Freeman, who was a war nurse.

First settlers of Santa Clara were – Potter, Joseph Gray, M.M. Davis, Sam Meek, Pitzer, William Montgomery, Bushnell, Thomas Belshaw, Octavius and S.H. Spencer, Richard Robinson, Emerson, Norris Humphrey, Maxwell, Green, Sparks, Belknap, Hunt, Jap Yates, Awbrey, Moore, Andy Conrad, William Robertson, Jerry Luckey and Frank Bond.

Footnotes

- (1) History of the Willamette Valley, Clark, p. 365
- (2) History of the Willamette Valley, Clark, p. 468
- (3) History of the Willamette Valley, Clark, p. 406
- (4) History of Lane County, Walling, P. 471
- (5) Rural Survey of Lane County